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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 17, 2007

Prammer: No Referendum on EU Treaty

11. Ahead of sessions resuming after the summer recess today, Austrian Parliamentary President Barbara Prammer of the SPOe outlines the key issues Parliament will be expected to address in 2007/2008. Topics include decisions on the EU reform treaty, Prammer says, and underscores that in her view an Austrian referendum is not necessary to pass the document, which is to replace the EU Constitution. She is "convinced" the treaty is "compatible with the Austrian Constitution." Reporting on Barbara Prammer's recent statements on the EU reform treaty, mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung runs the front-page headline "Parliamentary President snubs voters: The people don't get their say on EU!" With her announcement that a referendum on the treaty was "not necessary," the Parliamentary President, as well as the coalition partners SPOe and OeVP were "walking over the Austrian people," the tabloid continues. Prammer points out that the Austrian Parliament had voted in support of the EU draft constitution in the past, and she argues that the revised document, the so-called EU reform treaty, which the Kronen Zeitung describes as a "sham package," is "compatible with the Austrian constitution."

Gusenbauer Rebukes OeVP

12. Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer from the Social Democrats has rebuked his coalition partner OeVP for its stance on integration. Speaking on ORF television, the Chancellor criticized that a number of OeVP MPs had participated in a demonstration "alongside radicals and skinheads" against an Islamic center in Vienna. "It is a cause for concern, when individuals fail to clearly disassociate themselves from any kind of far-right mobilization," Gusenbauer warned. He also called for a "different tone" in the debate of integration issues. Like all major Austrian media, centrist daily Die Presse and liberal daily Der Standard point out that Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, speaking on ORF TV's Sunday morning program Meet the Press on September 16, underscored that "Terrorism, and dictatorship, the enemies of democracy, but not Islam, nor any other religion or faith, is our enemy." On Tuesday, the Chancellor continued, he wants to kick off a dialogue with representatives of different faiths, while making it clear that "Austria rejects fundamentalism. We are a country that has chosen a middle course, moderation and peaceful coexistence." This, however, requires that everyone in Austria observes values including tolerance, equal rights and opportunities, and open democracy: "Those who come to live in our country also need to observe those values, and they'll also have the chance to become proud Austrians, just as we are,"

Gusenbauer stressed. That is why the issue of Islamic fundamentalism needed to be addressed politically in the same way as those "die-hard, stick-in-the-mud groups and people" needed to be dealt with, who were continuing to live in the past, said the Chancellor.

More Money for Bigger Families

13. Families with three or more children may soon be entitled to a raise of child benefit payments per child and per month. Minister of Health and Family Affairs Andrea Kdolsky (OeVP) submitted the corresponding law for appraisal Friday. Under the new scheme, a family will receive 35 Euros for its second and third child combined, and another 50 for each further child, in addition to the monthly sum of about 400 Euros. The law also raises the income limit for big families. In total, the new child benefit package will cost the government 36 million Euros, and is expected to go into effect on 1 January, 2008.

According to mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich of September 15, Minister for Women's Issues Doris Bures from the SPÖ welcomed her OeVP colleague Andrea Kdolsky's announcement that families with three or more children can expect to be entitled to a raise of child benefit payments per child and per month as of 2008. The Greens family issue spokesperson Sabine Mandak, however, was more critical: "It would make a lot more sense to provide more money for the expansion of child daycare facilities."

Mukasey to Replace Gonzales?

14. US President George W. Bush is said to have chosen a replacement for outgoing Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. The US President is expected to nominate retired federal judge Michael Mukasey, who has presided over a number of high-profile terrorism trials. Gonzales stepped down earlier this year amid accusations that he fired eight lawyers for political reasons and later lied about it.

ORF online news describes the potential successor for the post of Attorney General, Michael Mukasey, as a "retired, conservative federal judge." Sourcing the Washington Post and the New York Times, ORF online news adds that although Mukasey is considered a conservative, and a "man of law and order," he is also has the appreciation of the Democrats, which should rule out any major problems in connection with his Senate confirmation. The 66-year-old Mukasey was the presiding judge in several terrorism cases during the past decades, and also worked as a legal advisor to Republican presidential hopeful Rudy Giuliani.

IAEA Members to Discuss Nuclear Security

15. Nuclear experts from around the world are gathering in Vienna this week for a meeting which aims to make nuclear energy safer and to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons. The 144 member nations of the International Atomic Energy Agency will discuss nuclear security as well as measures to protect against nuclear terrorism. IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei has warned of the risks in connection with nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists.

Meanwhile, ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal, reporting on the issue of Iran, says that the French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, has given a warning about the possibility of war over Iran's nuclear program. Speaking on French television and radio, Kouchner stressed that "we have to prepare for the worst, and the worst is war." The Minister also emphasized that although negotiations with Iran should continue right to the end, an Iranian nuclear weapon would pose a real danger. Tehran meanwhile continues to deny it is trying to acquire nuclear weapons, but insists on its right to enrich uranium.

Over 90 Killed In Thailand Plane Crash

16. According to ORF online news, the death toll in yesterday's plane crash in Thailand is now put at 91. About 40 people -- among them one Austrian from Vorarlberg -- escaped the burning wreck, after the plane, which was operated by budget airline One-TwoGo, skidded off the runway at Phuket Airport in heavy rain. Investigators say that

two flight recorders have in the meantime been recovered. According to the Austrian Foreign Ministry, it is not clear whether any other Austrians may have been among those killed in the crash, as the authorities in Thailand have not yet published a full list of passengers.

Karamanlis Wins Greek Elections

7 The governing conservative party of Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis has claimed victory in the general elections. With most votes counted, his New Democracy Party won almost 43 percent of the votes, compared with 38.5 percent for Socialist party Pasok. Karamanlis said his party therefore had a clear mandate "for a new, more dynamic beginning" to "continue more swiftly and decisively the changes, and the reforms the country needs." The Greek election campaigns were dominated by last month's devastating forest fires, ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal reports.
McCaw